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Community development in contemporary ethnic-pluriform neighbourhoods: a critical look at social mixing

Peer Smets*

Abstract Many disadvantaged neighbourhoods increasingly face pressures from globalization, modernization and individualization, which have arguably helped to accelerate a decline in local-level social cohesion and social maintenance mechanisms. Many governmental officials, politicians and community development workers consider community development a tool for improving mutual solidarity and social maintenance, leading to improved social cohesion, liveability and safety in these neighbourhoods. Today, 'mixing' strategies are popular tools for linking residents with a different ethnic and/or class background. The assumption is that once people are enabled to mingle, bridging social capital will develop easily. However, in practice, contact between heterogeneous groups and individual residents does not develop spontaneously. Once positive encounters take place, this may lead to the development of mutual trust, which is crucial for the development of successful citizens' initiatives in the Netherlands and elsewhere, a process worthy of more attention from professionals and researchers.

Introduction

Bridging contact is needed in this period of globalization and increasing diversity of ethnic groups at local settings. This is also a period in which many 'old' communities have been eroded by individualism and a decline in social maintenance mechanisms. A new mode of living together

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has to be found among existing residents and also among in-coming migrants with an individual and group-oriented culture integrating traditional and modern ways of thinking. Due to the increased heterogeneity of urban society and specific neighbourhoods, questions of social cohesion have become urgent issues. Social cohesion has arguably declined, while an increasing heterogeneity requires new initiatives to bring people together. This paper will explore possibilities to improve contemporary social cohesion at the neighbourhood level.

The impact of an increased diversity of people in society was already addressed by Hall (1993, p. 361), who wrote that 'the capacity to live with difference is (...) the coming question of the 21st century.' In the past, diversity was sometimes associated with crime, conflict and withdrawal, but hopes for the contemporary city focus optimistically on its potential as a site for connecting diverse citizens (e.g. Boyd, 2006; Valentine, 2008, p. 324; Wood and Landry, 2008).

Cultural differences can start to be bridged through processes of mixing (Smets and Salman, 2008) and hybridization in public spaces (Wood and Landry, 2008). Such bridging initiatives have become more concerted after the 9/11 attack on New York that led to a widening gap between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western cities. A range of events have fuelled this division, such as the murder on the Dutch cineaste Theo van Gogh, as well as the bombings in Spain, London and elsewhere. At the political level in Holland, Muslim migrants tend to be blamed for being unwilling to integrate into Dutch society. Moreover, Geert Wilders, a member of the Dutch parliament, has been an outspoken and harsh critic of Islam (Verkuyten and Zaremba, 2005; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007; Dagevos and Gijsberts, 2008).

This paper will focus on the following question: what is the positive potential of social encounters between people with a different ethnic background for community development in the Netherlands and possibly elsewhere? First, a theoretical introduction will be given on communities, social cohesion and social capital, which will be followed by a discussion of neighbourhood interactions. This theoretical background helps us to understand the description and analysis of bridging initiatives in the Netherlands. These findings will hopefully provide insights for community development in an age of diversity, where meaningful inter-ethnic communication deserves to be an important priority.

Communities, social cohesion and social capital

Today, many initiatives seek to bring groups together to enhance community development. By community, we mean places of inter-dependencies,

where people and institutions provide opportunities and support activities, but they are also barriers and constraints (DeFilippis and Saegert, 2008, p. 1). Places for meeting others can be formally created. For example, community drop-in centres are spaces where encounters are relatively informal and can become familiar or home-like through repeated visits. These encounters are not incidental as meetings on the street and squares (Conradson, 2003).

Communities have changed over time. In this respect, Wellman (1979) discusses the notions of community as 'lost', 'saved' and 'liberated'. Whether communities are one or the other, one can argue that most people remain relatively place-based even in this period of globalization, modernization, individualization and hypermobility (Massey, 1994; DeFilippis and Saegert, 2008, pp. 3–4, 163; Sampson, 2008, p. 165). 'It is a fact that [p]eople (...) can and do form *communities*, by virtue of facing common sets of issues in their daily lives' (DeFilippis and Saegert, 2008, p. 4). Apart from the importance of local community for economic resources and social-structural differentiation, Sampson (2008, p. 165) also emphasizes that

local community remains essential as a site for the realization of common values in support of social goods, including public safety, norms of civility and mutual trust, efficacious voluntary associations, and collective socialisation of the young.

This 'place boundedness' offers scope for community development for which purpose social professionals often seek to enhance unity and social cohesion. To avoid confusion about concepts, I will discuss first the concepts social cohesion and social capital before going back to the issue of community development. Social cohesion is a catchword that evokes a whole host of definitions and interpretations. One illustrative definition by Chan, To and Chan (2006, p. 290) is:

Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations.

This definition encompasses only essential elements of social cohesion and not its causes and effects. That is why social inclusion, equal opportunities, tolerance and a specific set of shared values are excluded. This would imply that social cohesion is not a process but a state of affairs (Chan, To and Chan, 2006, pp. 292–293). Moreover, one should realize that social cohesion does not tell us something about the conscious and self-reflexive actions of people, which are hard to influence directly (Tonkens, 2009, pp. 60–61).

The scholarly view on social cohesion tends to differ from the policy-oriented approaches where the focus generally is on tackling 'cleavages' and overcoming segregation (Chan, To and Chan, 2006, pp. 279–285). In discussions about social cohesion, the notion of social capital also often crops up. However, these concepts should not simply be considered interchangeable. Social cohesion is a more holistic and general concept encompassing socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of a specific society. It does not of itself cover more specific components such as social tolerance between groups or necessarily encompass 'multicultural' values. Social capital, on the other hand, focuses on both the individual and group level, addressing, for instance, the social networks that have to be upheld by individuals to secure individual benefits (Chan, To and Chan, 2006, pp. 292–293).

Although Putnam's (2000) notion of social capital is much disputed, with an alleged conservative bias, his interpretations and applications do helpfully make a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is exemplified in the reciprocal trust relations among a group of people with a similar background, such as class, gender, ethnicity and lifestyle. In contemporary society, however, people also need to go beyond their group belonging and group dependence. In policy circles, therefore, attempts are made to foster individual and group capacities to construct bridges to others or to establish links between different groups in society. The hope is that such bridging connections could improve social cohesion at street, neighbourhood and city levels. In addition to bonding and bridging social capital, the concept linking social capital has been introduced. Szreter and Woolcock (2004, p. 655) describe linking social capital as the 'norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or power gradients in society.' In short, linking social capital relates citizens and institutions.

The decline of social capital is identified by some analysts as the cause of urban problems in the United States (Putnam, 2000). However, in the Netherlands, many citizens are still socially active and organized in civil society (Dekker *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, globalization processes have led to greater diversity that citizens must learn to cope with. Some argue pessimistically that wide diversity amongst neighbourhood residents might have negative impacts on mutual solidarity (Putnam, 2007). Thus, many contemporary policies aim at developing bridging social capital, such as mixing different ethnic groups at schools, in the neighbourhood, at sporting clubs and at the work place. However, mixing policies are often focused on social classes and only indirectly on ethnic groups. Bridging social

capital assumes shared interests among individuals in a community, and that once these interests are brought together, 'win-win' situations can develop (Putnam 2000; Fung, 2004; RMO, 2005; Uytterlinde, Engbersen and Lub, 2007, p. 157; DeFilippis, 2008, p. 34; Smets and Salman, 2008).

Social capital is often seen as the motor for collective action in society or part of society, such as a neighbourhood, encompassing networks, trust and shared norms and values generated through repeated social contact (Putnam, 2000), which is examined further below.

Neighbourhood contacts in theoretical perspective

Encounters never take place in a space free from history, material conditions and power. The danger is that contemporary discourses about cosmopolitanism and new urban citizenship, by celebrating the potential of everyday encounters to produce social transformations, potentially allow the knotty issues of inequalities to slip out of the debate. (Valentine, 2008, p. 333).

Encounters refer to the micro-scale of everyday interactions. Although Amin (2002) pessimistically suggests that social interactions have declined and city streets are spaces of transit that produce little actual connection between strangers, still many different types of encounters take place, such as holding doors and sharing seats on public transport. Such encounters express a mode of togetherness which is one facet of mutual acknowledgement (Laurier and Philo, 2006; Soenen, 2006). Such mundane friendliness and compassion increase the potential for further development of deeper and more extensive social relations. These everyday moments can be seen as reservoirs of hope where positive knowledge about the other can lead to a better mutual understanding and the development of affective bonds (Boyd, 2006; Dixon, 2006, p. 2183; Smets and Kreuk, 2008; Dagevos and Gijssberts, 2008). Many social professionals focus on the creation of encounters between citizens at squares, neighbourhood centres, schools and sporting facilities. However, whether such encounters lead to sustainable contacts is rarely studied (Engbersen and Uytterlinde, 2006). Moreover, a focus on everyday civil encounters carries the danger that questions about power will be sidelined, such as who has the power to tolerate, and other issues of equality and mutuality (Weymss, 2006 in Valentine, 2008, p. 329; Müller and Smets, 2009).

To obtain insight into the development of social contacts, Snel and Boonstra (2005) describe a bonding ladder with four rungs. At the first rung, people meet, which will be followed by the second step, where one can develop knowledge about the other. This knowledge could be the basis for cooperation (step 3) and development of relations of mutual

help (step 4). One should realize that such positive knowledge about the other is crucial for the development of trust relations, which is needed for the establishment and maintenance of contacts and possibly friendships (Duronto *et al.*, 2005, pp. 556–558). Trust is often dependent on reciprocal exchange, which connects people through feelings of gratitude and obligation. It can be seen as the moral cement of society (Duronto *et al.*, 2005, pp. 556–558; Smets and ten Kate, 2008).

This brings us to the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979 [1954]), which assumes that positive contact will lead to mutual understanding. This depends, for example, on the quality of the contact, whether it is voluntary, if it exists between people of an equal status and is established in a cooperative environment (Dixon, 2006, p. 2182). Other researchers have since added numerous other conditions to this list. This has led to a multiplicity of ‘favourable’ and ‘unfavourable’ conditions (Amir, 1969, p. 319; Dixon, 2006). However, these numerous conditions for enabling optimal contact make the hypothesis unfalsifiable (Dixon, 2006, p. 2180). Despite these shortcomings, the contact hypothesis offers the possibility of studying mutual contacts in specific contexts.

Bovenkerk *et al.* (1985, p. 304) question the contact hypothesis’ assumption that living in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood will improve understanding between separate groups. They have found, for example, that the individual Moroccan neighbour may often be accepted, but Moroccans as a group may still be judged unfavourably, with the ‘good’ Moroccan neighbour considered an exception to the general rule. Thus, individual everyday encounters do not necessarily change people’s general prejudices about a specific group because the hegemonic ‘white’ majority community-based narratives of economic and/or cultural victimhood remain unchallenged (Valentine, 2008, p. 333). She adds: ‘positive encounters with people from minority groups do not necessarily change people’s opinions about groups as a whole for the better with the same speed and permanence as negative encounters’ (Valentine, 2008, p. 332).

In their neighbourhood study in the Dutch city of Utrecht, Bovenkerk *et al.* (1985) contended that, instead of excluding their new neighbours, the established residents were initially engaged in concerted attempts to involve the new non-Western migrants, who primarily wanted their new migrant neighbours to adjust to Dutch habits and norms. However, when the number of non-Western migrants increased, they tend to stay within their own groups, which led to reprisals by established residents against the newcomers, who wanted the newcomers to adjust to established values with respect to tidiness, orderliness and decency: keeping the neighbourhood neat, making children go to bed early and speaking the Dutch language (Bovenkerk *et al.*, 1985, pp. 317–321). Likewise, Blokland (2003,

p. 172) also suggests that the established residents in a Rotterdam neighbourhood do not necessarily exclude non-Western newcomers. Nonetheless, they are not considered equals; they are simply expected to adjust to Dutch norms and values. Müller and Smets (2009) show that residents' willingness to help migrant newcomers tends to diminish once they think that these migrants can help themselves.

The contact hypothesis does not presume that the presence of a large minority population among natives is problematic. Social identification encompasses the relationship between identification and attitude towards one's own as well as other groups, which can lead to a certain degree of social competition resulting in prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion. In general, people judge their own group positively and view others more negatively (Verkuyten, 2006, p. 66). In contemporary Holland, non-Western migrants are expected to focus more on Dutch society and cultural habits and less on the norms and traditions of their own ethnic group. The political and public debate has thus become far harsher (Verkuyten, 2006, pp. 64, 77; Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007).

Many Dutch studies, according to Gijsberts and Dagevos (2004, p. 145), confirm that negative attitudes with respect to minorities are often found among the less privileged groups in society. Since non-Western migrants often find themselves in the lower social positions, established residents in a similar social position experience the greatest degree of competition and feel the most threatened. In their later work, Gijsberts and Dagevos (2005, p. 91) found that support for the competition hypothesis at the neighbourhood level applies when established residents are under fifty percent of the population and where they articulate feelings of being threatened.

Bridging initiatives in the Netherlands

In 1989, the initiative Opzoomeren started on a small scale in the city of Rotterdam. Residents came together to clean their street – a place of common identity – and improve its safety and made it cosier, which led to a range of other encounters. This initiative was expanded to other parts of the city and later to other Dutch cities. Other activities were added, such as the good morning parade in 1999, where greetings were seen as an expression of mutual respect and neighbourhood complicity. However, these activities strengthened bonding social capital rather than bridging different ethnic groups (Van der Graaf, 2001). Such initiatives have spread and can be seen in other parts of the Netherlands where people wear t-shirts with the text 'hello neighbour', or information signs are placed on the pavements with the text 'Greeting is normal'. In addition to Opzoomeren, there are other activities where different ethnic groups can meet, such as street

festivals, dialogue projects and coffee meetings. At first sight, meeting on the basis of shared interest appears to be more effective, such as language classes, school, child-raising, buddies and mentorships. However, such encounters do not always run smoothly and persons involved are often those with an open mind for meeting persons with another ethnic background (Uyterlinde, Engbersen and Lub, 2007).

In general, bringing people together is associated with organizing cosiness (in Dutch: *gezelligheid*), which encourages people to do more things together with the result of improved mutual tolerance and cohesion. However, this surpasses the reality of small conflicts and daily disagreements which are hard to solve, even though minor disagreements do not necessarily prevent a liveable neighbourhood or city (Tonkens, 2009, p. 67). In the following, three such initiatives will be critically discussed.

Sharing food

Sharing food by a barbeque or bringing home-made food is seen as an option to bring people together, through which contact can be established. Projects are initiated where people from different ethnic backgrounds share food at each other's home by turn. Sharing food can bring people together but in reality this is not always as easy as expected, which will be illustrated with the following example.

In a neighbourhood in Amsterdam, 'white' inhabitants of the same street have set up a residents' group of one street which organizes also a yearly street festival, which they call 'the picnic'. All residents are informed about the activities with leaflets and posters placed in the windows. All participants bring their own food and drink, which are to be shared by all. In addition, specific festivities, such as a puppet show and street dance, are organized. Before the eating and festivities start, mainly 'white' residents clean the street. Small children of different ethnic backgrounds help them. At the playground, preparations took place for the festivities. Garlands are hung in trees, and tables and chairs are positioned.

In the meantime, youngsters of Moroccan and Turkish origin were seen hanging around at a small square in the street. They were invited to play a game of football between the juniors and seniors on the playground. One of the organizers, a middle-aged 'white' man, asked a boy on a cycle to mobilize his friends for the football game. He added: 'We do this for you,' and explained to me that 'there were frictions between the football players. A few days ago, they were not allowed to play and now they have to turn up. They boycott it.'

From a nearby window, lemonade was provided. Slowly, home-made food and drinks were brought in. The people bringing the food were

mainly 'white' well-educated people. On the tables were many bottles of wine. Some migrant youngsters were hanging around and they were offered some snacks, including apple pie. Those participating in the picnic were mainly 'white' well-educated residents. Some complained about the low number of participants, especially among migrants. The year before was perceived as having been better, it was more crowded and some Turkish women had come to watch the dancing performance of their daughters. They also brought some pancakes. This year, the youngsters boycotted the football game.

The 'white' newcomers' intention to invest in the relations between residents was not appreciated by all. One of the activities was the annual picnic. A 'white' woman, who helped to organize the picnic, was disappointed by the poor turn out of the immigrant families and stressed: 'We try to get them involved, but they do not come. It has to be a bit spontaneous.' Another 'white' woman, who wanted to involve Muslim people, added: 'We feel that we should organise something for the women, but that takes too much effort. Because then we also have to organise something for the men.' The 'white' newcomers stressed that especially non-Dutch people should come before the picnic could be considered a success. It was agreed that pork or ham would not be used in the dishes. In this respect, a native Dutch resident said when he was invited: 'Why should we join the picnic. We want to eat ham and bacon.'

The picnic of 2003 took place at the playground. Tables were packed with food and wine bottles. The consumption of alcohol was one of the reasons why Muslim migrants did not participate. Moreover, photographs taken at the picnic may have encouraged the non-Dutch residents, especially women, to stay away. Only one Turkish couple joined, and almost no interaction with the newcomers took place. It was the community development worker who had to offer them a seat. The 'whites' probably expected that the Turkish couple could help themselves. They expected the opportunity to be together, but in practice, the participants tended to stay apart.

Youngsters hung around at a short distance. Some food was offered, but they tried to disrupt the activities. A 'white' woman expressed her irritation, and said: 'These brats of sixteen will not dictate what I do. I am not afraid of them.' Different notions concerning the use of the public space in the street also lie at the root of these irritations. The street is for everybody, but those who use it determine what goes on there. If the weather permits, the children of the migrant families are sent out to play on the street. This is, to a large extent, due to the size of the households they belong to and that they must live together in small houses (see, for a more detailed description, [Smets, 2006a](#)).

Coffee in the neighbourhood

One of the ideas that have been implemented in Amsterdam East is Coffee in the Neighbourhood (Bakkie in de Buurt). Volunteers go with a small car to a specific street or square in a neighbourhood and build up a terrace where residents can enjoy a cup of tea or coffee together with neighbours. This would enable contact between neighbourhood residents. One of the volunteers said:

That is a way of meeting other neighbourhood residents. I have encountered my neighbour and invited her to come along for a cup of coffee at my apartment. Today too many people live too much apart together.

Coffee in the Neighbourhood was also used to reclaim the street from drugs traders and youngsters hanging around and those involved in the drug scene. At a corner of the Afrikaner Square, which is the favourite hangout for dealers and users, the coffee endeavour was set up. Some believe it helps in reconquering the street but not everyone shares that view-point, saying it is a way of approaching problems common in the 1970s, but which does not fit contemporary circumstances.

One of the community development workers stressed: 'Youngsters were surprised about what happened. If you know more people one feels safer.' Such encounters at the street could help establishing social control. This works only when people know each other. One of the Moroccan street kids said:

The Moroccans had to laugh. They were young adults who found it amusing. They found it a rare idea to drink coffee on the square. The Dutch wanted coffee and sat down, but there was no coffee. Still it has to be made.

An exchange circle between established residents and asylum seekers

In the Dutch town of Woudrichem, asylum seekers live in an asylum seekers' centre located in a boat. To overcome the isolation, the Local Exchange System Circle Woudrichem (LCW) was established by members of the host community. LCW is based on the principle of Local Exchange and Trade Systems (LETS), which are community-oriented networks in which goods and services are exchanged between members of a group. Such exchanges can be facilitated by the introduction of a local currency, here called Drops.

In the beginning, asylum seekers primarily offered services and went to work in the homes of private individuals. Some examples of their activities were painting, repairing bicycles, housework, gardening, sewing, cutting

hair and babysitting. The established community offered fewer services in return, and mainly earned their 'Drops' by offering products such as second-hand goods. Once the amount of second-hand goods declined, asylum seekers had difficulty spending the 'Drops'. In 2001, an LETS shop was opened for the Drop earners, which offered new possibilities to spend. Thanks to an exchange fund, the LETS shop was able to buy, amongst other things, telephone cards and foreign food products from other shops. During this second phase, the transaction model was better attuned to the needs of both the asylum seekers and established residents. Although some women visited local people's homes weekly, the tasks available for men were often incidental. Indeed, the demand for services decreased when there were too few local private individuals for the asylum seekers to be brought into contact with. While there was less demand for services, the supply remained unchanged. The LETS shop was a favourite place to spend Drops. At this time, the LCW decided that it would also allow businesses to participate in the project. Two possibilities were created for these enterprises: internships and sponsored labour. An internship gave asylum seekers the opportunity to work in a company if that firm also wanted to train someone. Some internships were at, for example, a graphic design studio, a cleaning company and several local farms. The second option was to offer sponsored labour at local non-profit institutions, such as an elderly day-care centre and a school. The LCW would then pay the asylum seekers an allowance in the form of Drops.

LCW made a positive contribution to the local community by means of recurring encounters. Subgroups of both the host community and asylum seekers were brought into contact with one another through transactional ties. Within both groups, people with divergent motivations, individualistic or community-directed, were able to work together. The various meeting places, in people's homes as well as the LCW house or in Woudrichem itself, created the possibility of matching up all kinds of different people. Social and political structures and people's capacity to deal with each other were thus combined, allowing asylum seekers to become a real part of the social fabric of Woudrichem's local community. This would also make it easier for them to take more active steps towards integrating more fully into Dutch society at a later stage. The so-called waiting room period can be avoided, because talents do not have to be wasted while waiting for the asylum procedure to be completed. In particular, the project satisfied the asylum seekers' need for help and work. Since the organization made the match between supply and demand, the project worked to the advantage of both the asylum seekers and the local native participants (see, for more details, [Smets and ten Kate, 2008](#)).

Community development in an age of diversity

Contemporary community development in disadvantaged neighbourhoods typically has to deal with diverse ethnic groups. It appears that local contextual factors significantly influence 'best practices' but these may be copied and implemented elsewhere without properly taking this into account. This is because the state tends to look for blueprints to roll out (Scott, 1998). Thus, government officials tend to look for standardized solutions (*techné*) and refrain from incorporating local practices (*metis*). This could indicate that professionals tend to employ top-down initiatives and refrain from enabling citizens to develop grassroots solutions. Instead, planners, policy makers and social workers focus on the diagnosis of social problems and the removal of pathologies. There is insufficient attention, if at all available, to how to overcome stumble block issues of communication, culture and power which hinder the consideration of local knowledge, values and culture (Arnstein, 1969; Scott, 1998; Smets and Den Uyl, 2008).

Professionals have a profound knowledge about social engineering and prefer solutions based on their professional knowledge, which makes the incorporation of local knowledge difficult. Some social workers even confiscate (ideas for) projects to professionalize them as illustrated below:

In an Amsterdam neighbourhood several women of different ethnic backgrounds wanted a place where women could meet and can tell each other stories while drinking a cup of coffee. This would enable women to tell their children fairy tales from other countries. This endeavour would enable more in depth contact between the women. A local community worker managed to obtain subsidy for this initiative and established a multicultural women's centre without involvement of the initial citizens. Once the women centre was established the community development worker asked several original initiators to coordinate the centre on a voluntary basis. They refused because they felt that the idea of a women's centre has been confiscated by a professional and did not belong any more to the original diverse group of women.

Professional knowledge may conflict with local knowledge, which is often associated with lower quality or standards (Smets, 2006b). This makes it extremely difficult for professionals to take local knowledge seriously, but without incorporating the local knowledge about intra- and inter-ethnic contact, misunderstanding may dominate and gaps widen between people. This happened clearly with the sharing food example above.

The initiative 'Coffee in the Neighbourhood' shows that a mobile meeting place brought to the doorstep could enable the first contact between people to be more positive. However, local people have to find out whether they

want more or different contact with other residents and have to cope with inter-ethnic communication, which is not an easy endeavour.

It is an often neglected topic among professionals, but it deserves attention as [Valentine \(2008, p. 330\)](#) stresses:

If we are to produce meaningful contact between majority and minority groups which has the power to produce social change, this gap needs to be addressed. We need to find ways in which everyday practices of civility might transform prejudiced values and facilitate liberal values to be put into practice.

One of the few projects dealing with this issue is *Speaking is Gold* (Praten is Goud), in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in the city of Arnhem in the eastern part of the Netherlands. Here, a study on intercultural communication among neighbourhood residents is combined with both social regeneration and physical renewal. Neighbourhood interactions take place among neighbours but also among those living in each other's living environment; public and semi-public places such as streets, alleys, shared hallways and stairways in housing complexes. Although most studies and projects focus on social problems or deficits, this project emphasizes the positive side of neighbourly relations. The focus is on friendly, warm and supportive relations between established residents and migrant newcomers, with special attention for different activities and themes such as greeting, daily care, mutual help, sharing food and drinks, emotional support, celebrating, children and dealing with institutions. All these issues may be transacted with different cultural codes. To understand these codes helps us to understand how migrants and residents approach each other in social life in general and in multicultural neighbourhoods in particular ([Müller, 2005](#)).

Knowledge about inter- and intra-ethnic contacts is one issue, but it is also important to find a modern organizational form which can link people from different backgrounds. LCW, which was discussed in the previous section, is such an example. Here, the trading system – the exchange of products and services – was not the ultimate goal, but instead a means by which familiarity with the other could develop into mutual empathy. The exchange of products and services can be seen as a way of bringing and keeping people together. It provides people with the opportunity of developing weaker or stronger ties and ensures that people are brought into regular contact with each other. These contacts led to more employment rewards for asylum seekers in particular. The LCW trading system was a way in which people could engage in meaningful activities and establish social contacts. Trust between the participants was not a prerequisite for

achieving this. Instead, this developed throughout the course of the reciprocal activities for which the LCW laid down the norms and values.

As a form of organization, an LETS circle fits in well with the individualizing society and the changing position of the government. Increasingly, self-responsibility, stimulating and equipping oneself for participation in society, is seen to be of primary importance. The LCW was begun with a view to developing potential. People had services and skills to offer and this project sought to empower the asylum seekers. It stimulated them and allowed their competences to be utilized. The success of the LCW project was also due to the emergence of a valuable local network. The LCW initiative was based on factors that transcended ethnicity. The project began by focusing on the interests and needs that people could share with one another, rather than ethnic differences. This continually allowed people to bond with each other, irrespective of their cultural background. Moreover, it offered people the chance to look and see beyond the differences.

LCW is an organizational form for a specific context, but can also be applied in a slightly different setting. These are places where people can meet each other and the presence of multiple relationships is an advantage. The reconstruction of social networks – a gradual and cumulative process – is dependent on dedicated social leaders and the creation of new places where people can meet and recognize each other, talk and enter into relationships (Putnam and Feldstein, 2003, pp. 286, 291). The use of technology, such as information and communication technology, urban and regional planning and political will all play a significant role in the creation of such places today (Putnam and Feldstein, 2003, p. 294). Moreover, the frequency of such contacts is important, which does not detract from the fact that personal attributes, such as personal characteristics and previous experiences with minority groups, can play a role (Brewer and Miller, 1984, p. 295). In addition, keeping things on a small-scale can also increase individual responsibility for preserving the group (Putnam and Feldstein, 2003, pp. 277–278).

Conclusions

Although globalization and migration have led to an increased heterogeneity, place attachment continues to play an important role; people are attached to places such as streets, squares and neighbourhoods, and these have the potential for positive and reinforcing encounters between residents from a diverse ethnic backgrounds.

To enable bridging contact between different ethnic groups, many initiatives are employed in the Netherlands. Here, attention is paid to activities

linked with cosiness where the potential of meeting is present. It is believed that intercultural understanding is best achieved through micro-publics of everyday contact and encounter. The aim is that such organized encounters lead to mutual respect and ethics of care, which can be scaled up in space and time. However, the process of embedding inter-ethnic interactions is rarely facilitated. This is the place where misunderstanding about daily communications and frictions may develop. Under such circumstances, people reach only the first step on the bonding ladder where they meet. Developing positive knowledge about the other is the basis for cooperation and the development of mutual help. However, inter-ethnic contact can help to break down prejudices, but can also strengthen them. The guidance of inter-ethnic contact at the street or neighbourhood level is a relative new field of support for community development.

Making arrangements for people to meet has to be guided to overcome the difficulties of inter-ethnic contact. Mutual understanding of codes, norms and values is a must for all groups. This means that more knowledge should be accumulated about intercultural communication at the neighbourhood level. To understand the dynamics of inter-ethnic contacts and communication also requires insights into the nature of contacts for people with similar ethnic backgrounds. At this stage, linking and bridging social capital should go hand in hand where mutual insight in inter-ethnic contact and communication should be developed and discussed. This could help to remove misunderstanding and prejudices, leading to more sustainable if relatively weak ties among neighbourhood residents where cooperation and mutual help can grow. This is the basis for modern communities and liveable neighbourhoods.

Guidance for bridging contacts has also to be accompanied by setting up new institutions in which people with different backgrounds can easily join. The LCW trading system was a way in which people could engage in meaningful activities and establish social contacts. Trust between the participants was not a prerequisite for achieving this, but could develop during participation. Such an organization started with a focus on interests and needs that people could share with one another, rather than ethnic differences. This offered possibilities of establishing and maintaining bridging contacts. All these initiatives to guide bridging contacts have to step away from standardized solutions and need to incorporate local contextual knowledge. This asks for a process approach rather than blueprint solutions in which results are fixed in advance.

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